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The Christian News-Letter

Edited by KATHLEEN BLISS

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DEAR MEMBER,

The events since the last News-Letter went to press have left us all dazed. The mind can take in only a fraction of their meaning.

The Potsdam Conference has completed its labours and announced its conclusions. Decisions have been taken (or failed to be taken) which have defined and limited the possibilities of the future for Germany, Europe and the world.

The war with Japan has ended with the complete submission of the aggressor nation.

Overshadowing both these events, the dropping of the first atomic bomb has announced to the world a scientific discovery which, as has been instantaneously and universally-recognized, may be more far-reaching in its effect on the conditions of human life than even the agonizing and world-changing conflicts of the past decade.

But however radically the conditions of human existence may change as a result of atomic energy replacing existing sources of power, the fundamental problem of man's life will remain what it has always been. It is the question whether force is the ultimate thing in the universe and man himself a self-sufficient individual with an infinite desire of expansion and acquisition, and in the last resort a beast of prey, or whether he is in his essential nature a responsible being, bound to the pursuit of truth and righteousness, inescapably dependent on his fellows and finding his fulfilment in relations of trust and love towards God and his fellow-men.

In the light of this ultimate question of human fate let us look as steadily as we can at the realities of the world in which we live to-day. The substance of this News-Letter was in draft before it was revealed that a new era had opened in human history. That disclosure gives to what is said a new, intensified meaning.

UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

The aims of the victorious western democracies have been repeatedly and unambiguously asserted in the speeches of their leaders during the war years. Among the most recent illustrations are the statement in the proclamation of President Truman, Mr. Churchill and General Chiang Kai-Shek to Japan that irresponsible militarism must be driven from the world in order to make

possible "a new order of peace, security and justice," and Mr. Attlee's first utterance as Prime Minister, in which he expressed the belief that we are on the eve of a great advance of the human race, characterized by security from war, increasing prosperity among all peoples, co-operation between the nations and the brotherhood of man.

With the aims all will be in agreement. But we cannot too often remind ourselves that between the best intentions and the forces which actually mould human affairs there may be an unbridgeable gulf. History is full of warnings that events may take their course regardless of men's desires. If we are to avoid disastrous error we must know the real forces at work in our world.

But are we really capable of such an understanding? That is one of the questions that agitates Arthur Koestler in his latest book *The Yogi and the Commissar* (already noted in the C.N-L.[1]), a masterly analysis of the forces that are shaping human life to-day. He recurs again and again to his own experience of the impossibility of making people understand what has been actually happening in Europe. In three years of lecturing to the troops he felt, with some audiences at least, that while he was speaking he did succeed momentarily in convincing them that people were being tortured and murdered in concentration camps, that children were starving in Greece, that hostages in large numbers were being shot in France. But he realized how quickly, when the meeting was at an end, or at the best in a few days, the impression faded, and the listeners slipped back comfortably into the old world in which such things did not really exist.

This human disposition to live contentedly in a world of illusion and dreamland, partly because our small minds cannot take in more than a fraction of reality, but also because of our unwillingness to face its full bitterness, is something with which we must reckon from the start in any attempt to know the world in which we live. Even before this News-Letter appears in print the fundamental jolt to our whole way of thinking that we experienced on August 6th may have lost something of its force. The defensive mechanisms will soon be at work, and the old habits of thought and action will begin to re-assert their sway over men's minds with fatal consequences for mankind.

THE DEIFICATION OF FORCE

We are at a moment of time when man's reliance on force has reached its acme. A new engine of unparalleled destructive power has been launched upon the world. Aeronautical experts estimate that on President Truman's unchallengeable figures a single raid

[1] C.N-L. No. 235. Jonathan Cape, 10s. 6d.

by a thousand bombers carrying atomic bombs could destroy every building and kill every man, woman and child in Great Britain. That is the scale of the devastation which it was proposed to wreak on Japan if it refused to surrender.

For six years the leaders of the nations, and in particular of their military forces, have been facing mortal dangers which could be averted only by superiority of force. The connection between power and security has been driven deep into their minds ; even if they have always known it, daily experience has given it a new intensity of meaning. Their primary concern for the future is to ensure security based on adequate power.

The reality underlying all the discussions and decisions at San Francisco was the power relations of the Great Powers. Dr. Niebuhr has pointed out,[1] for example, that the Russian demand for the inclusion in the Charter of a provision that the purpose of trusteeship should be the ultimate independence of the backward regions appeared to coincide with, and even to outdo, the ideas of American liberalism, Christian and secular, but that what was really at stake in the discussion was the control of the Pacific. America for security reasons desires strategic bases in the islands of that area. The Russian aim was to obtain a formula which would weaken the strategic hold of the Americans over the Pacific.

We are the victims of illusion if we fail to realize that it is these factors of national security and danger that chiefly determine the action of those who direct the destinies of nations. The relative merits of this or that formulation on paper, which are the subject of much public discussion, are in comparison of little importance. If it is believed, moreover, that a rival nation and potential enemy will take the first opportunity of seizing an advantage which would make a vital difference in time of war, it may appear to statesmen responsible for the defences of their country, that they are under obligation to occupy the position first. This is a game in which the pace is set by the least scrupulous. The distressful things that are happening in eastern Europe are the consequence of an anarchical world, in which men have experienced at first hand the remorseless devastation of war, and in which there seems to be only one question —who will devour whom ? It is waste of time to preach liberal doctrines to men who are convinced that if they show mercy they will be ousted from power and forfeit their own lives.

POWER POLITICS

We have to start from the fact that international politics are in their nature power politics. The State is an embodiment of power. Where the vital interests of a State are in peril, it will almost invariably sacrifice ethical principles to expediency.

[1] *Christianity and Society*. Summer, 1945.

But it is equally true, and a much more important fact, that human relations cannot be based on force alone. There could be no more impressive vindication of this truth than what has happened in our own immediate experience. The first moves may go to the unscrupulous. Hitler's initial gains were made by exploiting the hesitations and pacific inclinations of the democracies. But in the end it was his disregard of moral forces that led to his undoing.

Lord Eustace Percy has done a great service in forcibly reminding us in his Riddell Lectures that "the history of civilized man is the history of the creation of the moral State. That may be said to be man's one historical achievement; or, rather, it is man's one historical adventure." [1]

A large part of the story of Europe is the struggle of the human spirit against the barbarous and cynical belief that force is the ultimate thing in life. Through a long period of European history a sense of moral obligation exercised a restraining influence on the egoism of monarchs and States. Respect for the sanctity of treaties was a principle which could not be violated with impunity.

This tradition has for long fallen into decay on the Continent. It has still persisted in Great Britain. Foreign statesmen and thinkers have frequently in private conversation with English friends expressed surprise and puzzlement at the part played by moral ideas in shaping British policy. "Do English people really believe," one of them remarked after a long study of our way of looking at things, "that ethical considerations enter into politics except as window dressing? If they do, then their approach and ours are poles apart. Politics in Europe have become power politics divorced from ethics."

Through centuries of experience of liberty under law, and through long training in the exercise of world power, Great Britain has learned lessons of moderation, tolerance and regard for the claims of others which constitute a restraining influence on the use of power. American foreign policy is sensibly influenced by the conception of the good neighbour.

How long these traditions will survive under present conditions we do not know. To re-vitalize them is in the political sphere the most urgent task of our time.

It has become plain that in the present state of the world no institutional arrangements are sufficient in themselves to guarantee peace. In the last resort everything depends on the will to peace of the nations that have preponderant power, and on their growing understanding that the only enduring peace is one that rests on justice and a due regard for the point of view and proper claims of others. The Great Powers, as was said in a recent Supplement (C.N-L. No. 235), have to become "Great Responsibles," by

[1] *The Unknown State.* Oxford University Press, 2s. 6d.

developing a sense of social obligation to the whole of mankind and by framing their policies on this basis. This is the crux of the whole matter.

It is in the relation between States that the establishment of the rule of law encounters the most formidable obstacles. What can be achieved in a world of cut-throat nations is only the barest minimum of justice. The creation of an international order is beset with such difficulties as to appear at times a sheer impossibility. But it is equally plain that the persistent attempt to order international relations on a basis of justice is the only thing that can save the life of mankind from degenerating into the conditions of the jungle.

Whatever the future may hold for our country, an inescapable responsibility is laid upon us by our heritage from the past and by our marvellous preservation in the present. We must leave nothing undone to bring our own policy, domestic and foreign, into accord with the demands of justice and mercy, and in our relations with others fearlessly assert that it is only in the pursuit of these ends that mankind can find safety and health.

It is plain to everyone that in the political field the dominant issue is the relations between Russia and the western democracies. To bring about understanding and co-operation between them must be the supreme aim of national policy. But the greater the importance we attach to it, the more certain we ought to be that it can be achieved, not by the surrender or compromise of what we believe to be right, but by the frank expression of our honest convictions.

None of us can ever forget what we owe to the heroic endurance of the Russian people. It is our plain duty to understand the present historical phase of Russian development which may make a dictatorship for the time being inevitable. But these are not reasons for refraining, when the fate of mankind is at stake, from asserting unequivocally our belief that human progress and welfare depend on the withering away of the totalitarian state, the preservation of fundamental human rights, the disappearance of secret police, of concentration camps and of forced labour, and the steady extension of political liberty. In particular, we need to insist on the crucial importance, in both national and international affairs, of free access to sources of information and free public criticism of those in authority, since it is an indispensable condition of social progress that the dark places in social life should be exposed to the light of day.

THE CONFLICT OF ULTIMATE BELIEFS

The fundamental gravity of the present situation is understood only when we realize that what we have to deal with is something much deeper than a breakdown in *practice*, resulting from a

temporary outbreak of forces of disorder, which with a little time can again be brought under control, or from a failure to expand and adapt our traditional ideas and systems to meet the changed conditions due to new technical inventions. At the root of everything is a *clash of ultimate beliefs*. The fundamental decision of human life, which was stated at the beginning of this News-Letter, has to be faced anew in the world of the atomic bomb.

That life is in its essence a struggle for power has become a dogma believed and accepted in the widest circles. Ruthlessness is justified and glorified as a manifestation of the inexorable law of life. The existence of an ultimate and immutable truth and justice, which transcend human desires and impose obligations on all men at all times, is openly denied. The totalitarian state is the inevitable result of the slow decay in the western world of belief in any values other than those which man himself creates. In Nazism and Communism the process reaches its logical conclusion ; the end is held to justify any and every means, and the end tends to be identified with the purposes of those who possess power. But the understanding of life in which the totalitarian state has its roots is present and potent everywhere. The life of Great Britain and America is deeply infected by it. It is this false understanding of life that is the real enemy.

INTEGRITY

What this spiritual war demands from us is, first of all, an austere sincerity.

We must awake to the fact that we have not breathed for six years the foul atmosphere of war without becoming contaminated by it. As the late Sir Eric Phipps, a former ambassador in Berlin and Paris, wrote recently in the *Sunday Times*, " We are all of us nearer the gutter and farther from the stars than we were in September 1939. Our sensibilities have become more blunted, our values reduced. We have slipped down the scale of civilization without even being aware of the fact."

We must face the fact that it is America and Great Britain that have introduced into the world the appalling destructiveness of the atomic bomb. That responsibility is theirs to the end of time. Our profound gratitude is due to those who toiled untiringly and courageously to anticipate the discovery by the enemy of this decisive weapon. It is not for us to judge those on whom rested the awful decision whether to use the new weapon or to allow the war to drag on at the cost of an even greater toll of lives. The question whether the bomb ought to have been used or not leads only to interminable debate about the comparative inhumanity of various forms of warfare. There is no right answer to a question arising out of a totally wrong situation. But no justification of the

use of the bomb, however convincing, can alter the fact that America and this country have made it plain that there are no limits to which we are not prepared to go for the sake of speedy victory. We have chosen that in ruthlessness in war we shall be outdone by none. The blotting out of great cities, in which were scores of thousands of persons "that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand," remains for ever on our conscience.

We can indeed be thankful that the discovery was not made by those who would have used it without remorse. The President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Great Britain have made plain their intentions that the new source of energy should be brought under effective control and used for the promotion and not the destruction of human welfare. But the difficulties in the way of international control are immense. It can be made effective, as Sir John Anderson has pointed out, only by unrestricted rights of *inspection*, and this involves a revolutionary limitation of national sovereignty. Can anything provide an impulse powerful enough to overcome these formidable obstacles except a religious understanding of the enormity of our offence before God and of the depth of inhumanity in which we have become involved?

THE RECOVERY OF JUSTICE

It is evident that on the widest scale there has been at least a momentary perception that we stand at the parting of the ways. The danger is that our minds may close again and we may sink back into the old lethargy. If the world is God's world and the universe contains these secrets, the discovery of them is God's gift to mankind. In this gift He is offering men what may be their last chance. Once for all the question has to be decided whether power is to become our master or to be made the servant of human well-being.

The readiness we have shown to use the new weapon reveals how subtly and imperceptibly we are surrendering ourselves to the idea that we exist to serve the play of impersonal energies, and that we achieve our end in releasing them.[1] There are few signs as yet of a realization that nothing but a radical conversion of our minds can save us.

No book that has recently appeared is of greater relevance to the situation that has been described than Emil Brunner's *Justice and the Social Order*, the English translation of which has just been published.[2]

[1] This doctrine was explicitly taught and powerfully expounded by a group of thinkers who before the war exercised a wide influence over the mind of German youth. The best account of them in English is contained in the concluding chapter of Erich Meissner's *Germany in Peril* (Oxford University Press, 7s. 6d.).

[2] Lutterworth Press, 10s. 6d.

Dr. Brunner is convinced that the state of the world is such that the question of the foundations on which a new order may be built can no longer be evaded. Where is the idea of *justice* on which the works of reconstruction can be based? This question, he believes, is not simply *one* of the questions confronting us to-day; it is *the* question on which all else turns. "Either there is a valid criterion, a justice which stands above us all, a challenge presented *to* us, not *by* us, a standard rule of justice binding on every state and every system of law, or there is no justice, but only power organized in one fashion or another and setting itself up as law."

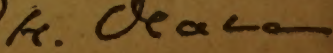
Mankind, Professor Brunner is convinced, no longer knows what the principle of justice is, but Christians might know it. His book is an attempt to understand anew the Christian meaning of justice, and to enquire what it means practically in the family, economic, political and international orders.

The new discovery of the secrets of nature has made the question which Professor Brunner raises inescapable. His book provides a strategical understanding of the conflict, sufficient at least for our immediate needs. We can no longer be in doubt about the nature of the fight to be waged. The immediate call is to gird ourselves for battle.

The fight has to be waged in the field of *public decision and action*. Religion can no longer remain aloof from the world of the machine. The issue is impressively presented in a letter from one of our members. The writer is an industrialist.

"The Russian technicians had to choose between the machine and religion. They threw over religion and, of course, ended with a *mystique* of the machine which was a religion. We met the impact of the machine by removing our religion for safe storage into an archaic world which had nothing to do with machinery. That no-man's-land was squashed by the conflict between the two halves of Christendom—our secular mechanization and the Russian religious mechanization. Can the joint approach of Orthodox and western Christianity enable us to get to the point of wanting to dedicate our new machines and factories to God before we start working with them? Unless we do, all attempts at government control will but enlarge the ultimate catastrophe. If we can so dedicate them, the scientist and technician will be able within this framework to make their crafts serve our true human needs."

Yours sincerely,



THE CHURCH IN GERMANY

The contents of this Supplement, which deals only with the Evangelical Church, are based on reports from the office of the World Council of Churches in Geneva and private letters from leaders of the German Church well-known to many in this country before the war. They reflect the outlook of the individual writers and the conditions that have come under their personal observation. Communications between the Churches in the different parts of Germany are at present so restricted that even the leading men know little of what is happening outside their own neighbourhood. No generalization is yet possible about the German Church as a whole. It is probable that every variety of attitude from heroism to apostacy may be found to have been present among Christians. What is known is that before the war a large percentage of the pastors, approximating to perhaps half, or even more, was definitely anti-Nazi and only a small percentage positively pro-Nazi.

RESISTANCE DURING THE WAR

Throughout the war resistance to National Socialist ideas and practice was steadily maintained. How general and how firm it was must be left to future historians to ascertain. But there were beyond question both prominent Churchmen and many simple Christians who refused consistently to compromise the Christian faith and Christian standards. The acknowledged leader in this opposition was Bishop Wurm, the Lutheran Bishop of Württemberg.

In September, 1941, in an address which was widely circulated by secret channels throughout the Evangelical Church, Bishop Wurm challenged the fundamental tenets of National Socialism. He concluded with these words :—

" We will not give up obedience to our Lord and His Word. When we listen to the words of next Sunday's Gospel : ' Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake,' we shall know with the early Christians that it is an honour to be reproached and persecuted for the Lord Jesus' sake. We shall continue proclaiming the Gospel while there is a breath left in us."

In 1942 an association was formed under Bishop Wurm's leadership to carry on the fight against National Socialist policy. It included the great majority of the Regional Churches (*Landeskirchen*) in Germany. Repeated protests were addressed to the authorities. In July, 1943, a letter was sent by Bishop Wurm to all members of the Government, making an urgent request " in the name of God and for the sake of the German nation to put an end to persecution and annihilation to which many men and women are subjected without legal sentence within the sphere of German rule." These measures it was maintained " are in the sharpest contradiction to God's commandments and violate the fundamental principles of all western thought and practice, the divine right of human existence and human dignity as such. Appealing to

these divine rights of man we solemnly raise our voice also against numerous measures taken in occupied territory. Happenings which have become known in the homeland and are being much discussed, weigh heavily on the conscience and strength of innumerable men and women within the German nation. German Evangelical Christendom urgently requests that full freedom of religion be granted to all nations and confessions subject to German rule, and that treatment in accordance with the principles of law and justice be guaranteed to all, regardless of nationality or confession."

In December of the same year when further measures were threatened Bishop Wurm again addressed a protest to the Government in which he said :—

" On religious and ethical grounds I have to declare in agreement with all positive Christian elements of our nation : As Christians we regard this policy of annihilation directed against Jewry as a deep injustice and fatal for our German nation. Killing without necessity of war and without legal sentence is contrary to God's commandments also in those cases where it is commanded by the authorities. It will sooner or later bring its nemesis, like every deliberate transgression of God's commandments. Our people widely regard the sufferings caused by enemy air action as retribution for what has been done to the Jews. The burning of houses and churches, the splintering and crashing noises during the raid nights, the escaping from destroyed houses snatching a few belongings, the helplessness in looking for a place of refuge painfully remind the population of what the Jews had to suffer on earlier occasions."

For the line he took Bishop Wurm was repeatedly threatened with action by the secret police and removal to a concentration camp. In the spring of 1944 he received a letter from a leading member of the Government telling him that if he continued in his course he would no longer be spared, in spite of the fact that his sons had fallen at the front. He let it be known that he had no intention of altering his attitude.

Pastor Günther Dehn, one of the most trusted leaders of the Confessional church, has written to a friend in Switzerland : " I hope you will not think that we ever walked along the nationalist track in these years. In this matter the Confessional church was, thank God, really united. She has never prayed for victory."

THE OUTLOOK FOR THE CHURCH

Christians in Germany, who have been true to their faith, have for many years been in danger of visits from the secret police, persecution, imprisonment and even death. From these dangers the victory of the United Nations has set them free. But the end of their trials is not yet. They share in the plight of a Germany which is facing famine and destitution, the break-down of ordered administration and inadequate police protection against roving marauders and criminals.

A picture of the situation of the Church is given in a letter by Pastor F. von Bodelschwingh, the head of the widely known centre of home mission work and community activities at Bethel, near Bielefeld, to the members of the Bethel community.

"Let us bow under God's judgment, not accusing others but beginning with ourselves, by turning wholeheartedly to Him who can transform the severest punishment into a blessing. It is because we believe in the God of this great transformation, that we are not despondent and in despair. . . . We have been thrown back for decades to the status of a colonial people which in a small way is capable of administration but not of self-rule. When in large areas of our country the pressure on our Church, which for twelve years has prevented its word and work, has ceased, that is something to be grateful for. But the Church must never forget that it will have to serve a completely impoverished generation burdened with a thousand disappointments and bitternesses and faced with a hard struggle for a miserable existence. Therefore, also in the Church we will have to subsist upon very small means."

"However, all this which looks like loss can become gain to us. Any form of worldly security is a serious danger to the Church of Christ. All that puts it completely on the way of faith is a wholesome present. The less material means, the more genuine love. The more insurmountable difficulties that turn up, the more manly and childlike will grow at the same time our trust in God who still to-day performs miracles.

GERMAN GUILT

The question of national guilt is one which deeply engaged the minds of the German Church leaders even during the war. Bishop Wurm was told that he must cease to speak in his sermons about God's judgments, and that further references to this would be regarded as unbearable defeatism. One of his sermons preached in 1943, of which thousands of copies were circulated, contained the following passage :

"Repent, humble yourselves, stop accusing others. Do like the men of the Bible who, during such catastrophes, first smote upon their own breasts. They identified themselves with their nation, but not by approving everything their elders and leaders did, but by taking the collective guilt upon themselves and making priestly intercession for the nation before God. That is the spirit which ought to govern the Church's action to-day. This insight into our own guilt alone will enable us to go the way God wants to lead us."

Pastor Bodelschwingh writes in his circular letter already quoted :—

"We cannot and we will not withdraw from the responsibility for the guilt and fate of our nation. We also do not want to excuse ourselves by pointing out that we did not know of all that happened behind the barbed wire of the camps, or in Poland and Russia. These crimes are the deeds of Germans, for the results of which we have to accept responsibility too. For as God visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation, so he lays the guilt upon a whole nation for what its rulers have done or commanded."

There is evidence in other letters that the Church leaders are deliberately setting themselves to bring home to their people their national guilt. It is no easy task, since human nature is always reluctant to see and admit guilt. But the religious task of making men aware of

their position before God is made more difficult, we are told, by two obstacles. Of these only hints are given, but we can with a little imagination see how they must operate.

The terms imposed on a defeated Germany are of necessity severe and harsh. Since those who impose them are themselves fallible and sinful men, the measures adopted are bound to contain elements of injustice; much also that can be justified at the bar of impartial justice must inevitably seem cruel and unjust in the eyes of those who suffer from it without knowing all that has made it necessary. Moreover, since the occupying forces, like all human societies, include people of all sorts, there are bound to be many individual acts of tyranny or cruelty. As compared with the wrongs committed, the wrongs suffered are more immediate and more directly experienced. Acute feelings of resentment focus attention on the wrong endured and inhibit the ability to recognize one's own fault.

The religious task of convincing men of their guilt in the eyes of God is made more difficult, secondly, when there is a confusion between human judgment and divine judgment. In the former, which is the judgment of those who are themselves sinners, there is always an element of self-righteousness against which men instinctively react. What the foreign radio is drumming into the ears of Germans about Germany's guilt is very different from the searching, impartial, discriminating judgment of God. True penitence cannot be brought about by propaganda.

It is certainly necessary that the crimes of Germany should be understood by the German people. But to bring this about requires delicate psychological understanding. The crude method of continuous scolding may only provoke an attitude of obstinacy even in those who are ready to admit their fault. What especially concerns us here is the necessity of clearly distinguishing between political propaganda and Christian penitence. The latter means that in the fellowship of the universal Church, we and our German fellow-Christians should together acknowledge our common sin before God and cast ourselves on the divine mercy, which is available for all and is the only hope for any of us. Those who have experienced at first hand the terrible power of demonic forces in their nation have learned lessons from which we all may benefit. They can help us to overcome the temptation to self-righteousness which is the besetting danger of the victorious nations.

J. H. O.

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